



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

March 5, 2014

Honorable Chuck Grassley  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Thank you for your February 3 letter requesting that the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services increase awareness of the financial aid resources available to help foster youth access postsecondary education and training. I understand that Secretary Sebelius will be responding to you separately. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Department of Education (Department), and I am sending a similar response to the cosigners of your letter. The Department is committed to ensuring that our nation's foster youth are aware of all federal funds available to support their higher education aspirations, and we recognize the need to further target our outreach efforts to improve this underserved population's ability to access and complete college.

Last May, Senator Feinstein and Senator Inhofe requested that the Department use the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) and other resources to increase awareness of the Educational and Training Vouchers Program for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care and other higher education funding sources for foster youth. In response, the Department updated its [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) Web site by posting a fact sheet titled "Educational and Training Vouchers for Current and Former Foster Care Youth." The fact sheet is accessible via the short, memorable URL [StudentAid.gov/foster](http://StudentAid.gov/foster). In February 2014, the Spanish translation of the fact sheet was posted at both [StudentAid.gov/foster](http://StudentAid.gov/foster) and its Spanish equivalent, [StudentAid.gov/crianza-temporal](http://StudentAid.gov/crianza-temporal). [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) currently provides information to more than 30 million customers a year.

In addition, in February 2014, the Department added the "Educational and Training Vouchers for Current and Former Foster Care Youth" fact sheet to the Financial Aid Toolkit, a new online resource aimed at high school counselors, college access advisors, and anyone who is mentoring a student through the process of learning about, applying for, receiving, and repaying federal student aid. The Financial Aid Toolkit is available at [FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov](http://FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov).

To raise awareness of the information and resources available to foster youth, the Department has a number of initiatives planned or under way. Because many states' FAFSA deadlines fall in March, and the FAFSA is routinely required for Educational and Training Voucher eligibility, several of the outreach initiatives were scheduled for February so that students would be encouraged to seek aid in time to maximize their eligibility.

Below you will find a summary table of the Department's engagement and outreach plan, noting the audience, communication vehicle, message, and target (or completion) date for each activity.

In addition, the table includes a reference to automatic messaging generated by the FAFSA when a student who may be eligible for aid for foster care youth indicates that he or she has been in foster care. Note that this plan is only a part of the larger outreach efforts the Department conducts year-round to raise awareness of the availability of financial aid (including aid for foster youth) from the federal government.

### Summary of Outreach Activities

Audience	Communication Vehicle	Message	Target or Completion Date
High school counselors, college access advisors, and similar mentors	Announcement on <a href="http://FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov">FinancialAidToolkit.ed.gov</a>	Counselors and mentors are encouraged to share the fact sheet with students; also remember that if a student was in foster care at any time since he or she turned 13, he or she is considered an independent student for purposes of the FAFSA and will not have to provide parental information on the application.	Completed February 2014
Students	@FAFSA Twitter account and Federal Student Aid Facebook account	Aid is available specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to a fact sheet about vouchers; please share this information with anyone who may qualify for the funding.	Completed February 2014
Staff from TRIO and GEAR UP programs; members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the National College Access Network	Posts on listservs hosted by member organizations for college access professionals	Aid is available specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to a fact sheet about vouchers; please share this information with any of your students who may qualify for the funding.	Completed February 2014



High school counselors, college access advisors, colleges, public librarians	E-mails directly to individuals on Federal Student Aid's mailing lists	Aid is available specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to a fact sheet about vouchers; please share this information with any of your students who may qualify for the funding.	Completed February 2014
Mentoring organizations (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs) and local governmental organizations	E-mails directly to individuals who collaborate with Federal Student Aid on regional outreach efforts	Aid is available specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to a fact sheet about vouchers; please share this information with any of your students who may qualify for the funding.	Completed February 2014
College financial aid administrators	Electronic announcement on Information for Financial Aid Professionals Web site ( <a href="http://ifap.ed.gov">ifap.ed.gov</a> )	Aid is available specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to a fact sheet about vouchers; please share this information with any of your students who may qualify for the funding.	Spring 2014, with follow-up in winter 2014–15
Students applying for federal student aid	Automatic response when student indicates on the FAFSA that he or she is or was in foster care (see below for details)	You may be eligible for aid specifically for current and former foster youth; here is a link to further information.	January 2015

In compliance with Division H, Title III, Section 310 of Pub.L. 113-76, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, the Department will modify the 2015–16 FAFSA so that it contains an individual box for the purpose of identifying students who are foster youth or were in the foster care system. Additionally, we will then notify those students of their potential eligibility for financial aid programs intended for foster care youth. Our technical and policy teams are currently reviewing ways to revise the FAFSA in order to accommodate the new functionality.

Several offices within the Department will also be working to reach out to other stakeholders who work directly with students in foster care. These efforts will be developed and implemented in collaboration with the Children's Bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services. Activities will include—but will not be limited to—communications with education and child welfare professionals at the state and local levels, blog posts, and newsletter articles in support of National Foster Care Month in May.

In addition to the activities described above and as requested in the letter, staff from the Department of Education, Federal Student Aid will meet with representatives of the Children's Bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services in the spring of 2014 to evaluate the value and success of current outreach efforts and coordinate future outreach efforts among the

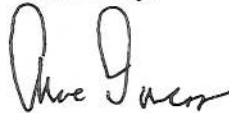
agencies. The Department also will be exploring other opportunities to improve collaborative efforts to support school stability and improved educational outcomes for students in foster care.

The Department welcomes any additional thoughts your office may have on outreach we could conduct to reach this important student population. I also hope you will share the resources available on the Department's Web site with your constituents and other stakeholders moving forward.

Thank you again for contacting me about this matter. The Department is dedicated to ensuring access to college for all eligible students, and we believe that the efforts described in this letter will make a significant difference in assisting college-bound foster youth graduate and succeed.

If you or your staff have any additional thoughts or questions, please contact our Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at 202-401-0020.

Sincerely,



Arne Duncan